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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 000718

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS FOR JORDAN OF THE HAMAS ELECTION VICTORY

REF: A. AMMAN 691

[B](#). AMMAN 635 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 b and d

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) The GOJ publicly said it "respected" the outcome of the Palestinian legislative elections, while King Abdullah stressed the need for the peace process to continue. Most Jordanian political analysts viewed the Hamas victory as a reaction to Fatah mismanagement, rather than Palestinian support for Islamic extremism. Several said the election results should serve as a "wake up call" for corrupt Arab regimes. Jordanian Islamists welcomed the Hamas win, and may be emboldened to step up their criticism of GOJ and U.S. policies. The ramifications of these election results for Jordan are enormous. Jordanian leaders and society have coped well with two issues - the place and potential power of political Islam, and the orientation toward and influence of Palestinian politics inside Jordan. But Hamas, victory will complicate these issues here. End Summary.

OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

[2](#). (U) King Abdullah, in reaction to the Palestinian legislative elections, stated publicly on January 26 that, "The elections should be a step towards building effective institutions that will be able to achieve people's aspirations and leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state." According to the Jordan News Agency, Petra, the King told visiting French MPs earlier in the day that no matter what the election results, a two-state solution remained the only "logical and reasonable way" to establish stability and security in the region. Meanwhile, GOJ Spokesperson Nasser Judeh told reporters that "Jordan respects the choice of the Palestinians and congratulates them on their smooth election process." On January 27, Petra reported that King Abdullah phoned acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to emphasize that "the results of the Palestinian legislative elections should not prevent us from moving towards peace to end conflict and violence in the region." In a call to PA President Mahmoud Abbas the same day, the King also reportedly affirmed the necessity of resuming the peace process.

JORDANIANS ANALYZE ELECTION OUTCOME

[3](#). (C) A few common themes have emerged among post's contacts on the recent Hamas election victory. Nearly all political analysts, commentators and MPs contacted by post assert that Palestinian voters chose Hamas because of widespread dissatisfaction with the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority over corruption and its failures to improve living conditions. Jamal Al Rifai, President of the Jordanian Society for Human Rights and frequent press contributor, said the elections showed that "Palestinians were disgusted with the corruption within Fatah," and that they chose Hamas because "it represented the only real political alternative." Most contacts also agreed that Hamas will face a major challenge in meeting the expectations of the Palestinian people and dealing with the international community. Analyst Oreib Rantawi, Director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Research, said that Hamas was in "a predicament" -- it will have to change and moderate its views to gain international acceptance and deliver tangible benefits to Palestinians, but by doing so it may lose credibility among its supporters. Ibrahim Saif, an analyst with the Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University, said Hamas would risk a cut off of the flow of foreign assistance and investment if it maintained its

hard-line rhetoric. Even with current levels of aid, Saif added, Hamas would be hard pressed to improve the standard of living of Palestinians.

"GIVE HAMAS THE CHANCE TO FAIL"

14. (C) Several analysts argued that Washington has to "give Hamas a chance" if Jordanians are to take seriously the USG's claims that it promotes democracy. "If the U.S. is calling for democracy in the region, then they must accept the results," said Rifai. Rantawi claimed that terminating U.S. and European aid would provide Hamas leaders with a convenient excuse for failure and spur public sympathy for them, while increasing charges of U.S. hypocrisy and anti-Americanism among Jordanians. Yasar Qatarneh, Director of the Regional Center on Conflict Prevention at the Jordanian Institute of Diplomacy, claimed that harsh international sanctions against a Hamas-controlled government could backfire against opponents of Islamic extremism. "Let's give them every opportunity so that when they fail - and they will fail - it will set back Islamic movements in Jordan and elsewhere in the Middle East."

A WAKE-UP CALL TO ARAB STATES?

15. (C) Some contacts also warned that the Palestinian vote should serve as a "wake up call" to current Arab leaders. "The election result was a lesson for Arab states -- corrupt, repressive regimes cannot remain in power if they don't change," said Rantawi. Similarly, Rifai stated that the Palestinian elections show that "corruption in Arab regimes may drive people to choose any other alternative, even if it is not a suitable alternative." MP Raed Qaqish (Christian East Banker, Balqa) commented that "this result should be a warning message for all corrupt Arab regimes -- when people feel repressed then there is fertile ground for Islamic groups to take control."

EMBOLDENING THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

16. (U) Shortly after the announcement of the Palestinian election results, Hamza Mansour, the Secretary General of the Jordanian Islamic Action Front (the political wing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood), publicly congratulated Hamas on its win and said the Palestinian people had rejected "the path of surrender which has been followed since the 1993 Oslo Accords." Abdul Majd Thneibat, Supervisor General of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (JMB), urged the GOJ to "start a new chapter with Hamas" in recognition that "it is now in legitimate power." He later added that "Jordan should open channels of dialogue and provide whatever assistance (the Hamas government) may require."

17. (C) Contacts almost uniformly predicted that the Hamas victory would embolden the JMB/IAF, spurring Islamists here to increase the volume of their opposition to GOJ and U.S. policies, and their claims that they would capture a large number of seats in parliament under a "fair" elections law. "If Hamas won support for attacking corruption, Israel and the U.S., Islamists in Jordan will probably follow suit," commented Qatarneh. Some analysts predicted that it would also strengthen the hand of more hard-line candidates in internal JMB/IAF elections in February at the expense of current IAF leader Mansour. Elements in the IAF criticize Mansour and his followers for their "don't rock the boat" approach to relations with the GOJ, and argue that the Front could become more popular by ratcheting up their criticism of the GOJ and U.S. policies. Thneibat, for example, asked if the MB could win a majority in parliament, said "our strategy aims at participation not winning" a line that the MB's East Bank leadership may no longer be able to use effectively with a mobilized Jordanian-Palestinian constituency.

18. (C) Comment: Hamas, victory has enormous implications for Jordan. For domestic and regional reasons, Jordan's national security strategy in part is built on the continued prospect of a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians. If the possibility of a two-state solution evaporates, many Jordanians fear an inevitable focus will return on Jordan as the Palestinian solution) a focus that would revive semi-dormant issues about Jordan's identity. Even just in the wake of the Hamas victory, this country's schizophrenia on all matters Palestinian is in full evidence. East Bank thinkers, resistant to electoral reform that would favor the Jordanian-Palestinian majority, are quick to point to the danger of similar results here) with the first test to come in municipal elections this Spring. Yet a consistent theme among pro-Palestinian writers is the need to adjust to

Hamas, victory and open a channel of communication with Hamas, effectively closed with the late-90s expulsion of the organization and its leaders. The King and other Jordanian leaders in private are hopeful that the results will compel Hamas and the Palestinian people to face a moment of truth about the policies likely to bring them security and peace. Meanwhile, these election results have complicated life for the Jordanians as well. Heretofore, they have coped well with challenges posed by the place and potential power of political Islam, and the orientation toward and influence of Palestinian politics. That effort just got more complicated.

Hale